THE FIRE AT OUR HOUSE

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SUMMARY

In April, 1940, I discovered a fire in our house. I summoned the Fire Department and they extinguished it with little difficulty.

The fire was caused by a flood of oil on the cellar floor and could have been very serious if it had not been discovered in time.

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One day, early in April of 1940, when I arrived home from a short trip in Annapolis, Md., my thoughts were far from the experience that was about to befall me that day.

It was very cold that day for April and the ground was covered with a thin blanket of snow. I was puting my father's car into the garage when I first sensed that something was wrong. All the cellar windows on the side of the house, next to the diriveway, were broken and very dirty. I put the car away and proceeded to the front door, with considerable haste, as my curiosity was arroused, as to how the windows became broken.

When I opened the front door, I was startled to find the house was full of the densest smoke I have ever seen. One couldn't have possibly seen the faintest outline of an object more than a yard away. From the smell of the smoke I could tell that it was from the oil burner. I thought that the chimney was stopped up or perhaps something was wrong with the burner itself.

Being unable to breathe,in the smoke, I immediately returned to the porch to regain my breath. Inhaling deeply the fresh outside air, I held my breath and dashed back into the house. I opened one window in the hall, as best I could with my eyes burning from the smoke.

When I returned to the porch I realized that the situation was far too server to handle alone, so I ran down the street, to the fire alarm box, and turned in an alarm, telling the Fire Department to come as fast as they could, and at the same time hoping that all the smoke wouldn't blow away until they came. I phnned my father, informed him of the situation, and then waited the fire departments' arrival.

Within three minutes I could hear the sound of sirens in every possible direction. In another minute the engines began to arrive. I signaled them which house it was, which wasn't necessary as the smoke was pouring out of the door and window that I had left opened.

I was impressed by the effeciency of the Fire Department, and for the first time in my life, realized to the full extent how essential they are to a community, even though they spend most of their time palying checkers, and shining up their engines.

As each engine passed the fire plug on the corner, two men would jump off holding the end of a fire hose, that unravled as the truck proceded down the street.

The first contigent of firemen dashed in the front door, which luckly was opened. To my amazment, they didn't take a hose with them, in fact not even a fire extinguisher. All they carried were axes. The second bunch of firemen from another engine, ran to the cellar door on the side of the house.

The door at the time was locked, and I told the

firemen that if he waited a few seconds, the men who went in the front door would let them in. But he just looked at me and smiled, and raised his ax. In spite of my yelling, "Hey don't do that", and "You won't think it's so funny when Dad hears about it" he let the ax fly. With that one blow he split the door from top to bottom, with glass and splinters flying in every direction. Then with his heavy boot he kicked what was left right off the hinges.

At the same time other firemen were breaking the window frames out of the cellar windows. I recall one cellar window that was still intact, that is, the panes were not broken. However a firemen noticed it the same time as I did, so he strolled over, and with the same motions as a golfer teeing off for a long drive, he put his ax in full swing. Before it hit the window another fireman on the inside opened the window, making a very interesting situation. The ax missed the window and the man inside, who was holding it, but the ax must have scared him and he let the window fall, breaking it anyway.

By this time there were six engines and at least six times that many fireman. They brought the fire under control in a short time and cleaned up the mess that they had made doing it. The fire had been caused by an excess amount of oil that overflowed into the cellar, instead of on the outside, when the driver delievered too much. The firemen estimated that 100 gallons of oil lay on the cellar floor and furnished the base for the fire, There is no doubt

that if the fire had not been extinguisted before it got completely under way, the damage resulting would have been very serious, if the house was not lost completely.

The house of course was insured, and the insurance company paid for the damage, but asking permission to sue the fuel oil company using my father's name, to which he consented.

The case came up about six months after the fire, and I went as a witness, since I had discovered the fire. The case started at 9:00 A.M. and lasted until 4:30 in the afternoon. Everyone who was in any way connected with the fire was called to the stand. The result was a tremendous amount of worthless, loosely connected information.

I have never seen such simple straight forward facts twisted about until they became so complicated that it would have been impossible for any jury to make a decision.

So, the judge who was presiding, interrupted for a second and asked one of the jurors to step off the jury box platform, which he did. The case then preceded in the usual manner for several minutes, and the judge pounded his gravel and said the case was a mistrail since there were only eleven jurors in the box instead of twelve. He also added before dismissing the case that the case could not be booked again for at least a year as there was a long waiting list and suggested that the matter be settled out of court.

That Judge was, in my estimation, a very wise man, for the case was settled in the hall outside of the court room doors with in ten minutes of the time the Judge called a mistrial. The Fire Insurance Company and the Fuel Oil Company divded the cost of the fire.